CONCEPT OF HEALTH

Definition of Health

WHO defined health in an international conference held at Alma Ata in 1997 as: *Health is a state of complete physical, mental, social well-being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity*. Later they added *"and ability to lead a socially and economically productive life."*

So here one thing is clear. *Health is not merely absence of disease*. It is more than that.

According to this definition, health is:

1. Physical well-being
2. Mental well-being
3. Social well-being
4. Ability to lead socially and economically productive life.

Criticisms against this definition are:

1. This definition is too theoretical. Practically, it is very difficult to satisfy these criteria. If the definition is accepted as it is, then none of us will be considered as healthy.
2. In the definition it is stated that *health is a state of well-being*. Practically, health is a dynamic process (i.e., everchanging process). It is not static.
3. Dimensions like:
   a) Spiritual dimension
   b) Emotional dimension
   c) Vocational dimension, are not included in the definition which some community physicians consider important.

Because of all these an operational definition of health has been devised by WHO study group.

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They defined health as *a condition or quality of human organism expressing the adequate functioning of the organism in a given condition.*

This definition is not rigid as the first definition. In this definition two criteria are important:

1. There is no obvious evidence of disease and the person is functioning normally.
2. The organs of the body are functioning adequately in themselves and in relation to one another.

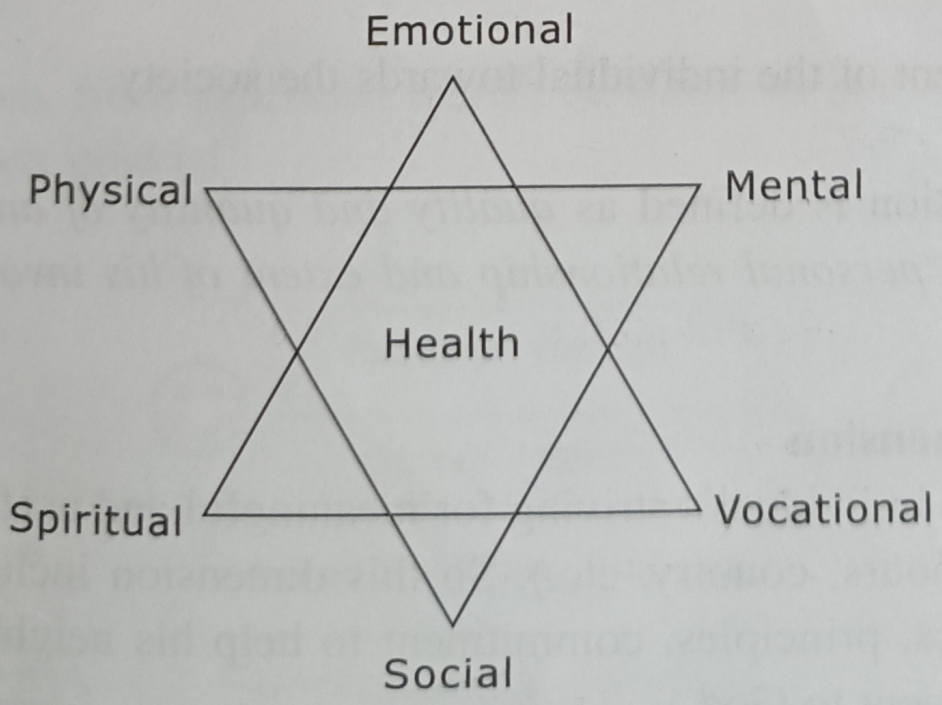
DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH

There are six important dimensions of health and out of this six dimensions, three are very important.

1. Physical dimension
2. Mental dimension
3. Social dimension

} Very important dimensions

4. Spiritual dimension
5. Emotional dimension
6. Vocational dimension



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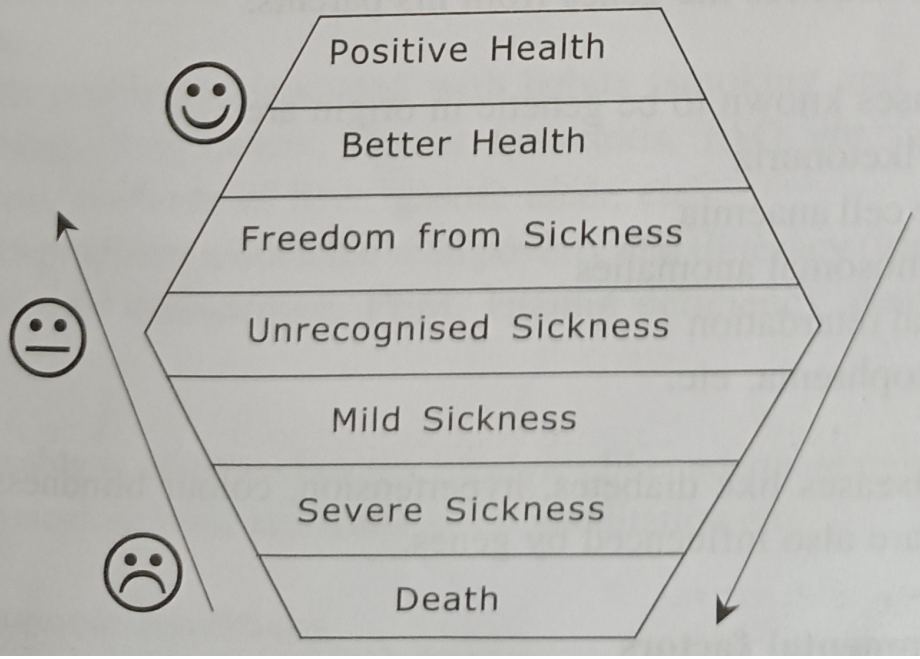
SPECTRUM OF HEALTH

It includes what is health and what is disease and it discusses how health ends and disease starts. It clearly explains that there is no single cut-off point between health and disease. It also includes the different stages of health and different stages of disease.

At one end of this spectrum is the most desirable state called *Positive health* and the other end is the most unwanted event called *Death*.

The transitions from optimum health to sickness and from sickness to death are often gradual.



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CONCEPT OF DISEASE

WHO has not defined disease. So there is no clear-cut definition of disease.

The commonly used definition is *a condition of the body or some part or organ of the body in which its functions are deranged.*

From the ecological point of view the definition is *a maladjustment of human organism to the environment.*

From the sociological point of view it is *deviation from normal function.* The term disease means without ease (uneasiness).

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Here agents are: Microorganisms, chemical agents, physical agents.

Environment: internal environment and external environment.

a) **Agent Factors**

i) Biological agents: Bacteria, virus, protozoa, helminth, fungal.

ii) Nutritional agents: Proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. Any excess or deficiency of these leads to disease.

iii) Physical agents: Exposure to excess heat, cold, humidity, pressure, radiation, electricity, sound, etc.

iv) Chemical (exogenous and endogenous) agents: endogenous (bilirubin in jaundice, calcium in kidney stones, urea in uraemia and kidney failure), exogenous (allergens, metals, fumes, dust, gas, insecticides)

v) Mechanical agents (exposure to mechanical force): Crushing, tearing, sprains, dislocation.

vi) Absence, insufficiency or excess of factors necessary for health:

Hormones	–	Insulin (diabetes)
ACTH	–	Cushing's syndrome
Thyroxine	–	(myxedema and thyrotoxicosis)

vii) Social agents: Poverty, smoking, drug abuse, alcohol.

b) **Host Factors**

i) Demographic characteristics: age, sex, ethnicity.

ii) Biological characteristics: genetic factor, blood group.

iii) Socioeconomic characteristics: income, occupation, literacy, housing, material possessed.

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iv) Lifestyle factors: smoking, alcoholism, behavioural pattern, food habits, living habits.

c) **Environmental Factors**

i) Micro (or internal) environment

ii) Macro (or external) environment.

Definition of macroenvironment: *all that which is external to human host (living or non-living) and with which he is in constant interaction.*

i) Physical environment (non-living things): air, water, soil, climate, heat, cold, housing.

ii) Biological environment (all living things): microbes, insects, rodents, plants, animals.

iii) Psychosocial environment: customs, habits, religions, lifestyles, etc.

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1. **Prepathogenesis phase**

It is the period before the onset of a disease in man. Disease agent first comes in contact with man. Factors that favour its interaction with man are already existing in the environment. This situation we can characterize as *man exposed to the risk of disease*. Now the interaction between agent, host, environment takes place. The disease process is initiated (infection occurred) in the man.

2. **Pathogenesis phase**

After entering of the disease agent (bacteria) into the host, they multiply in the host and induce tissue and physiological changes. Now the disease is established in the host. Depending upon the resistance of the host and virulence of the organism, the disease is mild or moderate or severe. The outcome of the disease also depends upon the above two factors and the outcome may be complete cure, chronic stage, recovery with disability or death.

We may change this natural phenomenon (natural history of disease) by using preventive measures at different stages of disease process. If we are able to prevent the interaction of agent, host, environment, this is called *primary prevention*. For this purpose we have two modes of intervention: (a) By promoting the health of the community (health promotion), (b) By specific protection.

If we start treatment after disease process starts, this level of prevention is called *secondary prevention*. Here the mode of intervention is *early diagnosis and treatment*.

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